

The year in education

REVIEW: A highlight of announcements, challenges and changes in the country's education scene last year

THE LEARNING CURVE TEAM
education@nst.com.my

EDUCATION BLUEPRINTS

Last year saw another milestone when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak launched the National Higher Education Blueprint 2015-2025 to transform the country's tertiary education landscape for the next 11 years.

The blueprint aims to produce students who aspire to be "ethically and morally upright, spiritually grounded, compassionate and caring" and who "appreciate sustainable development and a healthy lifestyle".

The Higher Education Ministry began developing the blueprint in 2013, drawing on multiple sources of input from Malaysian and international education experts, and also the public. More than 100 stakeholder groups and thousands of individuals were engaged in the process.

The blueprint addresses the need to move from a higher education system with a primary focus on university education as the sole route to success, to one where academic and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) pathways are equally valued and cultivated.



Najib Razak going through the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 during its launch.

Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh said getting an education can no longer be a mere paper chase as it involves initiatives to develop holistic, entrepreneurial and balanced individuals who can forge forward despite the challenges of the time.

Education is the single most important sector that needs to be strengthened in the country now. The strengthening process is well on its way upwards with guidance from the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 (Preschool to Post-Secondary Education) and Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025

(Higher Education).

Idris added: "Never before have we been so serious in putting things in order. The blueprints were developed through a collaborative process with input from various stakeholders in education. They are comprehensive and look into everyone's welfare in the sector. They also build linkages between the school and higher

education sector.

"With these blueprints in place, our education system is assured of staying on track, notwithstanding future changes in leadership at the ministerial level. They will steer education in the country until 2025 with the goal of being at the top one-third of nations in the world for education."



"At first, parents were not confident of PT3, which is assessed by the schools. Now parents are more aware of the concept and accept the assessment method."

Mahdzir Khalid,
Education Minister



Idris Jusoh delivering his speech during the Soaring Upwards roadshow in Kuantan.

SOARING UPWARDS

Following the launch of the Education Blueprints, Higher Education Minister Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh introduced the catchphrase "Soaring Upwards" to make the transformation of the system a national priority. It also serves as an inspiration for the ministry and stakeholders to move forward.

While acknowledging the process will take time, assurance was given that things are improving, taking shape and soaring upwards.

The ministry also organised roadshows nationwide to give the

public insight into the quality of education in the country, sharing success stories resulting from various initiatives over the last decade.

This aggressive awareness campaign also focused on achieving the 10 shifts mentioned in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education).

The 10 shifts address key performance issues in higher learning institutions including a focus on outcomes for students in academic and TVET pathways, the academic community and lifelong learning.

MINISTRY RESHUFFLE

On July 28 last year, the Education Ministry (under former Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin) was split into two, with a revived Higher Education Ministry in charge of tertiary education and headed by former Second Education Minister Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh. Datuk Mary Yap Kain Ching was named Deputy Higher Education Minister.

The Higher Education Ministry has been charged with putting into place a higher education environment that encourages the growth of premier knowledge centres and individuals who are competent and have high moral values to meet national and international needs.

Datuk Seri Mahdzir Khalid was appointed Education Minister. His Deputy Ministers are P. Kamanathan and Chong Sin Woon.



HAZE EFFECT ON SCHOOLS

While the start of the 2015 school year was postponed due to the floods, 4,778 schools in several states had to be closed because of the haze in October last year. The schools were ordered to close after the Air Pollutant Index reached

unhealthy and even very unhealthy levels. Some 2.7 million students were affected by the closures.

Altogether there were four occasions when the Education Ministry had to order a shutdown of schools due to the haze last year.

SIJIL PELAJARAN MALAYSIA ENGLISH COMPULSORY PASS POSTPONED

In August last year, a statement by the Malaysian Examination Syndicate said it has postponed the implementation of English as a compulsory pass subject in the SPM from this year. The decision to put the proposal on hold was to give teachers and students more time to prepare.

Data from the Malaysian Examination Board showed an almost consistent failure rate for SPM English since 2011. In 2011, 23.2 per cent failed the subject, 22.9 per cent in 2012, 20 per cent in 2013 and 22.7

per cent in 2014.

With 450,000 SPM candidates annually, it is said that if the implementation takes place as planned, the number of students who will not be awarded SPM certificates will be too high (with an estimate of 25 per cent failure in English based on the exam board simulation).

The proposal to make English a compulsory pass in SPM was announced in 2013 by the then Education Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin. It was part of the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 second implementation wave scheduled for last year.

NEW UJIAN PENCAPAIAN SEKOLAH RENDAH FORMAT

The enhancement of the UPSR format involving the English Language paper was welcomed by the Malaysian Congress of Teachers Unions in the Education Service.

Its president Datuk Mohamed Sabri Mohd Arsad said the move to grade comprehension and writing separately will be an effective gauge of the pupils' proficiency in the subject.

"This is the best form of assessment for the pupils after six years of learning the English language in school and will hopefully improve their proficiency," he added.

The new and improved 2016 UPSR format, which also involved

the Bahasa Malaysia, Chinese language, Tamil language and Science subjects, was revealed by the Malaysian Examinations Board.

The comprehension paper will include more subjective and less multiple-choice questions compared with the previous years.

From this year, UPSR candidates in SK schools will get six grades compared to the current five while those in national type (SJK) Chinese and Tamil schools will get eight grades instead of seven.

The new format is in line with the implementation of the Standard Curriculum for Primary Schools and School-Based Assessment in addition to culturing the elements of Higher Order Thinking Skills.

UNIVERSITY RANKINGS

University of Malaya (UM) has improved five notches to rank 146th in the annual Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings as compared with 2014.

This is the second consecutive year the nation's top public university has improved in its performance. It ranked 167th in 2013, and climbed to 151st (2014) and 146th (2015).

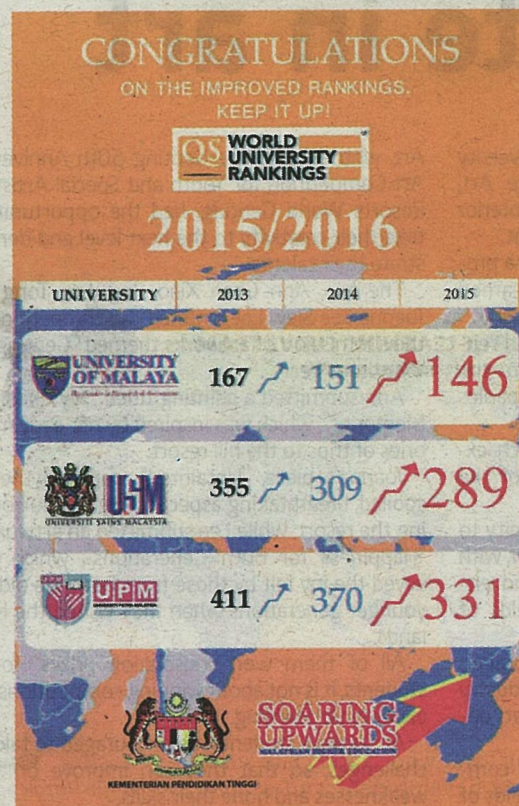
Universiti Sains Malaysia has climbed from 309th to 289th this year. It ranked 49th in Asia with an overall score of 43.4 points out 100 while Universiti Putra Malaysia recorded an encouraging improvement as it climbed from 376th to 331st in 2015.

UM also ranked 29th in Asia, with an overall score of 62.1 points. It achieved its best score in the academic reputation indicator through the faculty/student ratio, which measures the proportion between students and teaching staff, and also in the international faculty indicator.

Taylor's University was ranked in the Top 201-250 in Asia (as announced by QS Asia Rankings). Tay-

lor's University is the only non-GLC linked private university in Malaysia to make it to the top 250.

This achievement is a milestone for a young, dynamic and ambitious university such as Taylor's University in line with its goal of becoming one of Asia's leading tertiary institutions.



Three public universities — University of Malaya, Universiti Sains Malaysia and Universiti Putra Malaysia — improved their standing in the QS World University Rankings 2015/2016.

INTERNATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS

On the international front, University Teknologi MARA emerged the champion in one of the world's most competitive debating tournaments, the Cambridge Interschool debating competition.

Mohd Mifzal Mohd Murshid Kieron and Jasmine Ho, both 22, successfully defended the motion "This House believes that the international community should pay countries near to conflict zones to process, settle and restrict the further movement of refugees" in their position as opening government.

International Islamic University Malaysia won the English as Second Language category trophy at the same tournament.

Two Malaysian teachers and four 16-year-old students joined the Students On Ice (SOI) expedition from July 27 to Aug 10 last year to develop a deeper understanding of and respect for the planet and to make a difference in their communities and around the world.

The programme was made possible by Yayasan Penyelidikan Antartika Sultan Mizan through an understanding with SOI Foundation based in Canada.



BUDGET FOR EDUCATION MINISTRIES

In the government's 2016 budget for the Education Ministry, RM41.4 billion was allocated for improving the quality of education under the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025.

In addition, RM13.4 billion was allocated to the Higher Education Ministry.

Among others, the government will build 30 primary and 27 secondary schools.

A sum of RM44.6 million was also allocated to implement various programmes in 9,113 preschool classes in schools nationwide.

To increase proficiency in Bahasa Malaysia and English, RM135 million was allocated for upholding the former and strengthening the latter.

Given the importance of the English language to compete globally, two initiatives, namely the Dual Language Programme and Highly Immersive Programme, may be implemented as an option at a cost of RM38.5 million. In this respect, 300 schools have been identified in a pilot project.

To ease the burden of schooling expenses, the RM100 schooling assistance will be continued. From this year, it is targeted at schoolchildren from households with a monthly income of RM3,000 and below. This will benefit 3.5 million students through an allocation of RM350 million.

The supplementary food programme involving 550,000 students from poor families listed in e-Kasih will be enhanced. Previously, the programme only provided meals

during recess, but it will now be expanded to provide breakfast at an additional cost of RM173 million. The overall cost for the programme is RM423 million.

As in previous years, the government will continue to develop and maintain education facilities at schools which follow the national curriculum, with an allocation of RM500 million.

To strengthen higher education, the scholarship programmes will be continued with allocations as follows: RM1.65 billion through the Public Service Department; RM288 million through the Education Ministry; RM250 million through Higher Education Ministry; and RM258 million through the Health Ministry.

To encourage the rakyat to pursue higher education, the maxi-

mum relief on tuition fees for an individual taxpayer is increased to RM7,000 from RM5,000 a year.

This will be complemented with the continuation of the RM250 1Malaysia Book Voucher Programme for 1.2 million students. To prevent misuse of the voucher, the redemption will only be allowed at designated bookshops.

A sum of RM4.8 billion was allocated to 545 TVET institutions, bearing in mind that 60 per cent of 1.5 million new jobs by 2020 will be for workers with such skills.

The International Trade and Industry Ministry will establish an Industrial Skills Committee to coordinate TVET programmes in collaboration with industries which will benefit more than 330,000 trainees.



"We aim for graduates who are job creators. Today, we are dealing with issues of marketability and employability. The education transformation we are putting in place is aimed at providing solutions to these problems."

Idris Jusoh,
Higher Education Minister